

REGIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

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Introduction

New England faces a crisis of mass unemployment. The coronavirus pandemic has increased joblessness to rates unseen since the Great Depression. Vast numbers of unemployed people across the region are struggling to meet basic needs like food, housing, and healthcare. Many people are surviving almost entirely on unemployment insurance, and underemployed workers and undocumented families are often unable to collect unemployment benefits. Many of the jobs that have been lost during the pandemic are unlikely to return soon. Mass unemployment is not the only crisis we face. Climate change already poses severe threats to New England residents including heat waves, hurricanes, droughts, and forest fires. At the same time, the coronavirus pandemic poses a deadly, ongoing threat to New England residents. These three crises – mass unemployment, climate change, and the coronavirus pandemic – disproportionately harm frontline and vulnerable communities including Indigenous peoples, Black people, communities of color, migrant communities, the poor, women, the elderly, deindustrialized communities, depopulated rural communities, the young, and people with disabilities.

In addition to mass unemployment, climate change, and the pandemic, New England faces a fourth crisis: racial injustice. Systemic racism is present throughout New England society, involving everything from employment discrimination to systematic police violence.

We are the Renew New England Alliance, a new and growing coalition of more than fifty leading labor unions, racial justice organizations, frontline communities, and environmental advocates. We have come together to tackle these four overlapping crises. The core of our plan to address mass unemployment, the pandemic, climate change, and racial injustice is a **Jobs Guarantee**, which will ensure that everyone who wants a job will have one. Ultimately, to address these national crises, the Jobs Guarantee must be backed by the federal government and implemented nationwide. But states must lead the way. New England states will launch the Jobs Guarantee by supporting local, small businesses and creating new public employment initiatives designed to modernize our region's infrastructure and ensure that everyone's **basic needs** are met in the areas of (1) housing, (2) healthcare, (3) food, (4) energy, (5) transportation, and (6) clean air and water. Our coalition will conduct grassroots organizing and public education across New England, advocating for the implementation of a regionwide Jobs Guarantee, starting immediately with shovel-ready projects in all six states.

The jobs we create will meet or exceed the prevailing wage, paying no less than \$15 per hour. Workers will enjoy strong union protections, collective bargaining rights, and a full range of robust benefits including paid sick leave, workplace safety standards, and excellent health insurance. We will fully fund union-led programs to equip workers with the skills necessary for the new jobs that we create. Workers will be paid to participate in these programs, which will include "earn while you learn" apprenticeships. We will ensure that workers currently in the fossil fuel industry will not face unemployment, but will instead receive new, well-compensated, dignified jobs. Regional coordination is the key to protecting workers' rights and preventing capital from migrating to neighboring New England states with lower prevailing wages, sparser union densities, and weaker workplace safety standards. We will implement strong anti-discrimination measures to ensure that communities of color are well-represented in the public employment workforce.

The following policy platform discusses how our Jobs Guarantee, along with other programs, will ensure that these six basic needs are met for everyone in New England. This document then examines how the New England states can collectively finance our regional Jobs Guarantee.

Policy Framework

Housing is a basic need and we will guarantee it to every New England resident.

Our Jobs Guarantee Program will: Build new, carbon-neutral, climate-resilient affordable housing units, and repair existing units and install green retrofits.

We will build new affordable housing units with good insulation, energy-efficient electric appliances, and rooftop solar. Additionally, we will ensure that these new units are resilient to extreme weather events, located outside of severe floodplains, and equipped with ground-floor flood-proofing technology. Frontline and vulnerable communities will play a key role in identifying where these new units of affordable housing will be located. We will also create a large-scale housing renovation program to repair existing units; replace lead pipes; remove lead paint, asbestos, and mold; create better ventilation systems; and install green retrofits to lower their energy bills and reduce their carbon emissions. We will ensure that renters, not just homeowners, have access to these renovation programs.

These construction and renovation programs will ensure that affordable housing is not merely functional and low-carbon, but also safe and attractive. In the past, affordable housing has often been designed to be cheap, drab, and austere. But this program will fail if it is widely associated with ugly, lifeless, and unsafe housing. With our Jobs Guarantee program, affordable housing in New England will be inviting and attractive, with access to community areas, athletic facilities, and public parks.

This program will help New England's economy recover from the coronavirus-induced crisis by employing workers – like construction workers, plumbers, electricians, and architects – to build homes and install energy-efficient household appliances. Moreover, people need homes to lead productive lives. Addressing our severe shortage of affordable housing is a necessary precondition for allowing people to find meaningful and fulfilling employment, which is itself necessary for rebuilding the economy.

Additional Policy: Every New England state will enact rent stabilization, anti-displacement, and anti-discrimination laws.

Because it is enormously inconvenient to move homes, landlords can steadily raise their rents, extracting ever greater profits from their tenants even if the real value of their property stays the same. Rent stabilization is the most effective way to protect tenants' rights, ensuring that they are not unfairly forced out of their homes or forced to pay exorbitant rental fees. All six New England states will enact rent stabilization laws prohibiting landlords from raising rent by more than 4% annually.

Every New England state will also enact anti-displacement laws that prohibit landlords from deliberately making housing conditions unpleasant – by, for example, refusing to make routine repairs – in an effort to drive existing tenants away. Additionally every New England state will strengthen anti-discrimination laws, in order to ensure that communities of color are no longer subjected to housing discrimination. We will also ramp up enforcement of these anti-discrimination laws, which are routinely neglected under the status quo.

Healthcare is a basic need and we will guarantee it to every New England resident.

Our Jobs Guarantee Program will: Build community health centers and expand public education programs to train and certify more healthcare workers to provide medical care in New England.

We will build community health centers throughout New England where people can go to receive local, free, high-quality, comprehensive primary care, regardless of whether they are insured. These centers will be accessible by public transit and equipped with green retrofits to reduce their carbon footprint and increase their resilience to extreme weather events. Many areas of New England – especially in Black and Brown communities, poor communities, and rural communities – lack hospitals and clinics where local residents can receive healthcare. In order to remedy this problem, we will locate these community health centers in an equitable way, ensuring that everyone – including frontline and vulnerable communities – receive the benefits of free medical care.

We will also expand public education programs to train and certify more healthcare professionals to work in New England. This will help to address the longstanding shortage of nurses, doctors, and home health aides in many areas of New England. These education programs will be free. People taking on the essential task of providing healthcare to our society will no longer be burdened with student debt.

This program will help New England’s economy recover from the coronavirus-induced crisis by employing people to build community health centers and provide healthcare. Additionally, providing residents with access to free, high-quality medical care at community health centers will lower their healthcare costs, helping to pull them out of debt.

Additional Policy: Provide universal health insurance through a unified regional program.

Eliminating the shortage of community health centers and healthcare workers will go a long way towards increasing the availability of medical care, but these measures will not, alone, guarantee healthcare for all. The coronavirus pandemic has reconfirmed that any medical system that fails to cover everyone is both deeply unjust and unnecessarily vulnerable to the spread of contagious disease. In order to truly guarantee healthcare for all, we need to also provide universal health insurance. A unified, universal health insurance system, organized collectively by a number of New England states, would provide many of the advantages offered by a national-level single-payer system. In particular, pharmaceutical companies and medical device manufacturers that wish to sell their products in the region would be forced to negotiate with a number of states collectively, ultimately lowering prices.

Alternatively, there is another way to achieve many of the same benefits. Once community health centers proliferate and begin to occupy a large proportion of the regional healthcare market, these centers could form a powerful consumer cooperative. Companies seeking to sell healthcare products – like pharmaceutical drugs or medical devices – in New England would have to negotiate prices with the community health center cooperative, or lose access to much of the regional market. An individual community health center has no bargaining power leverage against a giant, multinational pharmaceutical company, but a community health center

cooperative that administers a large share of the medical care in New England would be in a much stronger negotiating position.

Food is a basic need and we will guarantee it to every New England resident.

Our Jobs Guarantee Program will: Expand support for small, local farmers, build a larger network of small, local farms throughout the region, and restore natural ecosystems.

The overwhelming majority of food consumed in New England comes from outside our region, shipped long distances with carbon-intensive transportation that makes us unnecessarily vulnerable to disruptions in the global food supply chain. To address this, we will expand our local agricultural industry by implementing the following measures.

We will increase support for existing small, local farms and build an extensive network of new small, farms across New England by offering land, equipment, and capital grants. In exchange for all of this additional economic support, farms will comply with ecologically friendly agricultural practices such as crop rotation, polyculture, and soil conditioning. We will also implement strong anti-discrimination policies to ensure that Black and Brown people are not prevented from accessing the financial support needed to start and operate their own farms.

Large corporations have been consolidating control over the agricultural industry in New England for decades, harming frontline communities by pushing small, rural and urban farmers out of business and siphoning the profits from local farming into large, out-of-state companies. We will restore prosperity and economic fairness to our region, reversing corporate consolidation, and protecting the right of all small farmers to make a fair, dignified living. We will also provide additional support to farms that choose to operate as worker-owned cooperatives. These cooperatives are an important way to ensure that farmers receive the full benefits of their own hard work and to protect their ability to run their own business.

Agriculture is deeply interdependent with the surrounding ecosystem. Widespread and longstanding environmental degradation threatens our food supply by damaging biodiversity, destroying pollinator habitats, and eroding soil. Continuing to degrade our natural habitats will precipitate systemic food shortages. To support local agriculture, we will restore natural ecosystems, rehabilitating damaged forests, fields, coastlines, and wetlands. This will also sequester carbon and increase our resilience to extreme weather events. We will also remediate brownfield sites, protecting nearby communities and ecosystems from residual pollution. Frontline and vulnerable communities will play a key role in selecting which areas are set aside for conservation and restoration, in order to ensure that this program is not used to uproot marginalized groups or dispossess them of their land.

This program will help New England's economy recover from the coronavirus-induced crisis by growing our region's agricultural industry, employing people to farm, construct irrigation systems, and distribute food locally.

Additional Policy: Dramatically expand food assistance programs.

Developing local agriculture is an essential first step, but it is not, by itself, sufficient to ensure that everyone has enough food. In order to completely eliminate malnutrition and food insecurity, every New England state will significantly expand food assistance programs.

Energy is a basic need and we will guarantee it to every New England resident.

Our Jobs Guarantee Program will: Install solar panels, wind turbines, and energy storage devices in order to ensure 100% zero-carbon electricity consumption for the entire region by 2030.

Every New England state will accelerate its transition to renewable energy by installing solar panels, wind turbines, and energy storage devices. We will prioritize equity and ecosystem stability when identifying the best locations for solar and wind farms. Frontline and vulnerable communities will help to identify the best locations for these renewable energy projects, in order to ensure that we do not uproot marginalized communities or dispossess them of their land.

This program will help New England's economy recover from the coronavirus-induced crisis by employing workers to design, produce, and install renewable energy systems. Every New England state will fully fund union-led programs to equip workers with skills that are critical to decarbonizing and modernizing the energy sector, such as installing new, energy-efficient HVAC systems; installing new geothermal-powered home heating systems; and installing new energy-efficient household appliances. Workers will be paid to participate in these programs. Every New England state will develop detailed legislative programs to ensure that workers currently in the fossil fuel industry will not face unemployment, but will instead receive well-compensated jobs with union protections, collective bargaining rights, and excellent benefits.

Additional Policy: Phase out fossil fuel infrastructure.

Every New England state will phase out fossil fuel infrastructure.

Additional Policy: Rapidly increase the proportion of zero-carbon electricity that utilities must supply.

Every state in New England already has an RPS statute, a law that requires utilities to purchase a certain (gradually increasing) percentage of their energy from renewable sources. While these RPS statutes are a good first step, they currently operate too slowly. Every New England state will amend their RPS statute to mandate that, by 2030, all of the electricity that utilities purchase must come from zero-carbon sources.

Additional Policy: Expand energy efficiency standards to ensure that all buildings use entirely zero-carbon energy by 2040.

Energy efficiency measures – like insulation, energy-efficient appliances, and low-carbon heat pumps – are essential for reducing overall energy consumption and making the transition to local renewables possible. Every New England state will implement ambitious energy efficiency standards for buildings. Large buildings and buildings owned by municipalities and states will be

required to meet these new standards on an accelerated timeline. When appropriate, small building owners will receive subsidies to help them transition to carbon-neutrality. Installing these new energy efficiency retrofits will also provide a good opportunity for desperately needed renovations on many public buildings including schools.

Transportation is a basic need and we will guarantee it to every New England resident.

Our Jobs Guarantee Program will: Build a large-scale public transit system and install electric vehicle charging stations in order to achieve regionwide zero-carbon transportation by 2040.

We will expand our public transportation system, making it efficient and convenient enough to be an attractive alternative to private transportation. All six New England states will work together to facilitate interstate travel across the entire region. Frontline and vulnerable communities will play a key role in determining where transit hubs and bus routes are located, to ensure that we equitably integrate all communities into the transit network.

This mass transit system must be not merely functional and free, but also convenient and pleasant to use. This project will fail if it is associated with dirty, decrepit buses or slow, drab trains. Our new public transit system will be clean, smooth, efficient, and attractive.

We will also install electric vehicle charging stations to reduce “range anxiety” and make electric vehicle travel easy and convenient. We will focus on installing them at frequent travel locations such as grocery stores, and near areas densely populated with workplaces or residences.

This program will help New England’s economy recover from the coronavirus-induced crisis by employing construction workers, engineers, bus drivers, and train mechanics.

Additional Policy: Improve active transportation facilities around mass transit hubs.

In order to be convenient and widely used, mass transit hubs must be easy to access, particularly for people who rely on active transportation – such as walking or biking – rather than personal motor vehicles. Every New England state will improve active transportation facilities, including bike lanes, pedestrian sidewalks, and wheelchair ramps around transit hubs. Closely integrating active transportation facilities with mass transit hubs can help solve the “last mile problem” by making it easier for commuters to complete their entire trip without relying on private motor vehicles.

Additional Policy: Support electric vehicle purchases.

Every New England state will offer financial support for purchasing electric vehicles, targeted towards low-income, rural, and working-class populations.

Clean Air and Water are basic needs and we will guarantee them to every New England resident.

Our Jobs Guarantee Program will: Create a pollution cleanup task force and a comprehensive recycling system.

An enormous quantity of pollution and waste has been channeled into Black and Brown communities and poor communities throughout New England. To address this, we will launch a regionwide pollution cleanup task force to remove waste from New England's frontline communities and to clean our rivers and coastline. We will also create a comprehensive, regionwide recycling system. Much of the material that gets "recycled" under the status quo actually winds up in a landfill because corporations often find it more profitable to quietly discard recyclable material. Our public recycling system will ensure that these materials actually get recycled. We will also provide financial support to local manufacturers transitioning towards greater use of recycled inputs. Frontline and vulnerable communities will play a key role in determining where the new recycling plants will be located, to ensure that this program is not used to displace marginalized groups.

This will help New England's economy recover from the coronavirus-induced crisis by employing workers to clean up pollution and run the new recycling system. This cleanup program will also reduce pollution-associated illness which inhibits people from leading healthy, productive lives.

Additional Policy: Protect Indigenous sovereignty over tribal land.

Indigenous communities have consistently been leaders in maintaining clean air and water. Every New England state will protect Indigenous sovereignty over tribal land. Doing so is essential to achieving ecological sustainability and social justice.

Additional Policy: Strengthen clean air and water standards and increase enforcement of existing regulations.

Every New England state will expand clean air and water regulations and ramp up enforcement in order to protect our communities from pollution. We will ensure that corporate polluters operating in New England cannot continue to poison our residents for profit.

Additional Policy: Replace water pipes made of lead.

Many homes in New England still use water service lines – the pipes connecting large water mains to individual buildings – that are made of lead. This exposes people to an extremely hazardous toxin that can cause serious neurological damage, especially to children. We will replace all lead pipes in New England, ensuring clean water for all.

Financing

We will fund our regional Jobs Guarantee from seven sources.

First, we will ramp up pressure on the federal government to expand coronavirus stimulus funding for states and municipalities to help us finance our Jobs Guarantee. To fight the Great Depression and World War II, the federal government massively increased spending from 3.4% of GDP in 1930 to 42.7% of GDP by 1944.ⁱ This expansion in federal spending helped to reverse the economic depression, defeat the Nazis, and lay the foundation for several decades in which the US enjoyed the most prosperous economy we have ever had, with historically low levels of financial inequality. We once again face a severely damaged economy, massive inequality, and another global crisis – climate change – requiring large-scale economic mobilization. Given the intense economic collapse precipitated by coronavirus, the federal government is already under escalating public pressure to mobilize its vast resources to revive the economy, and to expand aid to state and local governments. We can dramatically enhance this mounting public pressure by articulating a clear, attractive plan for exactly how our states will spend federal money to help our economy recover – precisely what our proposal does. By showing people how much they have to gain from a regionwide Jobs Guarantee, Renew New England will help accelerate the growing pressure on the federal government to expand Covid-recovery funding for states and municipalities.

Second, we will ensure that the wealthiest New England residents pay their fair share in taxes. They have received decades of tax cuts at the federal, state, and municipal levels. In all New England states except Vermont, the lowest-earning 20% pay a greater proportion of their income in state and local taxes than the highest-earning 1%.ⁱⁱ Ensuring that the richest 1% pay their fair share in every New England state is necessary to finance our Jobs Guarantee, and it will also be socially beneficial in a number of other ways. Most importantly, compressing wealth inequality will rebuild our democracy by reducing the disproportionate influence that the wealthiest wield in our electoral and legislative systems. Regional coordination can make raising taxes on the 1% far easier, because wealthy individuals will not be able to migrate to neighboring New England states to escape the increased tax burden.

Third, we will end mass incarceration, over-policing, and the militarization of law enforcement. These policies have devastated many communities across New England, particularly Black and Brown communities. Mass incarceration and over-policing are deeply racist and unjust programs, which systematically fail to make society safer, to rehabilitate offenders, or to address the structural conditions that foster crime. These policies also cost a great deal of money every year, much of it spent on arresting, prosecuting, and incarcerating nonviolent offenders and monitoring them through probation, parole, and pretrial supervision.ⁱⁱⁱ We will redirect this money towards Jobs Guarantee projects that will reinvest in our region's prosperity and help to reconstruct communities that have been harmed by our unjust law enforcement system.

Fourth, the Jobs Guarantee will dramatically increase local economic activity which will, in turn, raise cumulative tax revenues. Our policies will develop local industries involved in installing solar panels, wind turbines, and energy-efficient home appliances; expanding agriculture; and constructing new homes, community health centers, and railways. Repurposing waste and recycled items will help to generate raw materials needed to increase New England's capacity to locally manufacture some of these

products. All of this new economic activity will be subject to ordinary state and local taxes, increasing overall tax revenue.

Fifth, the Jobs Guarantee will substantially reduce the amount of wealth flowing out of our region. In New England, we extract none of the fossil fuels that we use, grow only a small fraction of the food that we consume, and manufacture few of the cars that we buy. This has turned our regional economy into a leaky bucket, with much of the money we spend on energy, food, and transportation flowing to giant corporations outside of New England, where it is not reinvested in our homes, businesses, and communities. Our Jobs Guarantee will plug these leaks by developing local agriculture to reduce our dependence on imported food, building public transit to reduce our dependence on imported cars, and expanding renewable energy to reduce our dependence on imported fossil fuels. This will substantially increase the amount of money that stays in New England, expanding local investment, and growing the pool of taxable wealth.

Sixth, we will issue state bonds. The global market for green bonds and other forms of sustainable debt has seen tremendous growth, increasing 78% between 2018 and 2019 alone.^{iv} More and more pension funds and university endowments are searching for stable investments that are unconnected to fossil fuels. State bonds, designed to fund ecologically sustainable economic recovery projects, could help to attract substantial investment. The Municipal Liquidity Facility could make state bonds easier to sell. The Municipal Liquidity Facility is a new program created by the Federal Reserve, in response to the coronavirus pandemic, to provide loans to states by purchasing large quantities of their bonds.^v The six New England states would, collectively, be eligible for \$15.6 billion in loans through the Municipal Liquidity Facility.^{vi}

Seventh, each New England state will establish a public green bank. These banks will manage a portion of the capital controlled by the states instead of hiring giant Wall Street investment banks to handle these funds. This will ensure that money controlled by our six states is invested in local Jobs Guarantee projects that will boost our regional economy and ensure a just transition to zero-carbon energy. These banks will also help states attract private capital including small deposits from local residents looking for a safe return on investment, as well as deposits from larger institutional investors. The Connecticut Green Bank, for example, attracted \$900 million in private investment for clean energy projects using only \$175 million of public money as leverage, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 3.7 million tons and creating over 5,000 green jobs.^{vii} Frontline and vulnerable communities will hold key decision-making roles in directing the investments made by these green banks. By establishing green banks, our states will increase funding for local Jobs Guarantee projects.

Conclusion

Our rolling crises – mass unemployment, climate change, the coronavirus pandemic, and racial injustice – demand serious and comprehensive action. All of these crises pose rapidly escalating threats to people’s basic needs, from clean air and water to housing, food, and healthcare. We need strong policies that speak to the deep urgency and vulnerability that people feel in order to unite and mobilize a broad, regional coalition capable of generating the political will to address our accelerating crises. New England needs a Jobs Guarantee.

Citations

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- ⁱⁱ Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, “Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All 50 States” (Oct. 2018), *available at* <https://itep.org/wp-content/uploads/whopays-ITEP-2018.pdf>.
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- ^v Federal Reserve Bank of the United States, “Municipal Liquidity Facility” (May 2020), *available at* <https://www.federalreserve.gov/monetarypolicy/muni.htm>.
- ^{vi} Federal Reserve, “Municipal Facility Limit Per State” (May 2020), *available at* <https://www.newyorkfed.org/medialibrary/media/markets/municipal-liquidity-facility-eligible-issuers>.
- ^{vii} Matt Pilon, “Financially Wounded, Pioneering CT Green Bank has a Path Forward” (Jan. 2018), *available at* <https://www.hartfordbusiness.com/article/financially-wounded-pioneering-ct-green-bank-has-a-path-forward>.